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SCIENCE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1909

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THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

AMERICAN STANDARDS IN EDUCATION
AND THE WORLD-STANDARD¹

For the most part, higher education in America has been carried on by institutions singularly isolated one from another. Each has been a law unto itself. The state has conferred upon them academic powers, but has not defined their academic responsibilities. In a little less degree, the same separatism has prevailed in our secondary education, and again in less degree in our elementary schools.

We were individualists in our education, with institutions as our units, before we became out-and-out individualists, with single students as our units. It is hard to see how this individualism could now be carried further, unless it might be by extending the elective system down through the grades and into the primary school. The most radical advocates of free election, however, balk at the offer to six-year-olds of a choice between learning to read and learning to make mud pies. Here at least the doctrine of equivalence breaks down, and indeed it seems doubtful whether the elective system will spread very far beyond its present boundaries. Its great vogue in our best universities, its long ascendancy, the personal weight of its ablest advocates—even these considerations can not disguise the fact that, in the long sweep of educational history, it is a mode, a fashion, a phase, and not the ultimate solution of a problem of the ages. In more trivial and

¹ Address of the Vice-president and Chairman of Section L. Baltimore, 1908.